



Judith
HENRY

**SAMPLE
CHAPTER**

T H E D U T I F U L

D A U G H T E R ' S

G U I D E T O

C A R E G I V I N G

A P r a c t i c a l M e m o i r



**PRAISE FOR
THE DUTIFUL DAUGHTER'S GUIDE TO CAREGIVING**

“Reading Judith’s book is like having a close, smart friend guide me around the potholes of caring for an aging parent. She writes with both humor and poignancy on this complex and sensitive subject.”

Val Perry, Coordinator/Instructor

Bloomingtondale Life Story Writing Program, Valrico, Florida

“*The Dutiful Daughter’s Guide* is a little gem of a book, packed with the kind of information that every caregiver needs.

Delivered with laughter and not a few tears, it’s a must-read.”

Anne Lawrence, Caregiver, Tampa, Florida

“Judith has delved with humor, complete seriousness, and full knowledge into one of the most complicated aspects of relationships – helping people leave their lives through the gift of active love. Readers will find meaning and support on their own journey as caregivers.”

Marilyn Lairsey, Ph.D.

Clinical Psychologist, Portland, Maine

TABLE OF CONTENTS

.....

CHAPTER ONE

I'm OK and You're *Going to Be* OK

1

CHAPTER TWO

HIPAA, SCHMIPPA

Step One in Becoming Your Parents' Healthcare Advocate

5

CHAPTER THREE

Trust, but Verify

Critical Documents Every Family Caregiver Needs

9

CHAPTER FOUR

Father Knows Best

Making Financial Arrangements

19

CHAPTER FIVE

Kosher Pickles. Check. Blood Pressure Meds. Check.

The Importance of Lists

27

CHAPTER SIX

Take Two Aspirin and Read This

Questions for the Doctor

33

CHAPTER SEVEN

We Were Never the Waltons
Sibling Relationships and Caregiving

37

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Caregiver's Toolbox
Otherwise Known as Your Purse

43

CHAPTER NINE

The Stitch That Holds It All Together
Coming Unraveled and How to Cope

47

CHAPTER TEN

My Dad Was a Lousy Tipper

55

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Bath Chairs, Walkers, and Grab Bars, Oh My
Outfitting a House for Aging Parents

59

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Day in the Life of an Engineer
Dementia Was Not Part of the Plan

67

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Ten-Four, Daddeo
Letting Go

77

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

In My Father's House There Are Many Boxes

Deconstructing a Life

81

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

When Home Is Only Temporary

Choosing a Transitional Rehab or Nursing Facility

89

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Planning Mom's Funeral...

With Barbra Streisand's Help

101

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Using *Laughter* and *Hospice* in the Same Sentence

109

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

What Love Will Bear

Being Present at the End

115

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Cone of Uncertainty

Dealing with Grief and Loss

121

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Facts of Life

A Different Perspective

127

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

One Last Thing

Something I've Always Wanted to Say

131

.....

GLOSSARY

Terms to Make You Sound Like an Expert

(and maybe a little Jewish)

133

SUGGESTED READING

Like You Have Time

141

BOOK CLUB STUDY GUIDE

147

CHAPTER ONE

I'm OK and You're *Going to Be* OK

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The Talmud, an ancient Hebrew text, says there are three things a person should do before they die:

Write a book

Have a child

Plant a tree

I've got it covered. When both my parents became ill in 2007, even my reputation as a pragmatist, a planner, and a dutiful daughter (my father's term) couldn't prepare me for what lay ahead as a caregiver—a long list of concerns that included navigating an unfamiliar healthcare system, addressing financial and legal issues, dealing with family dynamics, choosing a rehab center, and ultimately, making hospice arrangements. Trying to make sense of what was often a chaotic time, while processing voluminous amounts of information, I did what has always been second nature to me. I wrote. About what worked and what didn't; about the ways in which the past, present, and future often

intersect; about finding humor in the oddest places, and how often that saved me when nothing else could. And from all this, *The Dutiful Daughter's Guide to Caregiving* was born. In some ways, it was like moving from a Lamaze class into the actual delivery room. I employed some newly learned coping strategies to ease the discomfort, practiced focused breathing to calm myself down, and when none of that worked I resorted to lots of pushing and profanity. As for planting a tree, what became clear to me was the deeply rooted connection I had with both my parents, and despite some angst, it led to a greater understanding of myself and a profound appreciation for the qualities I inherited from each of them.

It also provided one hell of an epiphany. Caregiving is not for the disorganized or the unprepared. While there's no way to plan for every scenario (believe me, I tried), you can become more knowledgeable about your role (be it volunteered or commandeered) as an advocate for your parents' well-being.

Some of the things you'll need to become familiar with include:

- Getting used to a whole new healthcare vocabulary
- Talking to doctors and getting answers
- Creating or updating critical legal documents
- Deconstructing Medicare protocols
- Responding to upended family dynamics
- Choosing a rehabilitation or nursing facility

- Clarifying and honoring your parents' end-of-life choices
- How to take care of yourself through it all

This is one of the most important jobs you'll ever take on, and make no mistake—caregiving is a job. One of the few in which 40 hours a week is considered part-time.

Your duties might include assisting a parent with daily personal care; home maintenance, cooking, or grocery shopping; scheduling and handling transportation for doctor's appointments; acting as a companion or healthcare advocate; being available during emergency situations; researching healthcare options; managing financial matters; and/or offering ongoing emotional support. It should come as no surprise that family caregivers typically provide more than one of these services.

If you're getting tired just thinking about it, I can't blame you. But for what it's worth, you're joining a very large club. According to the National Alliance for Caregiving, sixty-six million individuals in this country provide unpaid caregiving assistance for an ill or aging family member.

That's a big number, but also a reassuring one. It means that the person next to you at the grocery store, the hairdresser's, or a book club meeting is likely to understand what you're dealing with. Single or married, caring for a child, a friend, a partner, or a parent, we're all in this together, and sharing our experiences can be empowering and comforting at the same time.

And that's why I've written this book. To offer up what I've learned, in the hopes you'll feel more prepared to take on the role of caregiver. To keep you company in the doctor's office, the emergency room, or sitting in an airport. To answer questions you don't even know to ask yet. To give you the big picture, while sharing the tiny details that can make the difference between a good day and a bad one for you and your parents. Even to acknowledge that it's okay to wish your mother or father a good life and a good death. The two are not mutually exclusive. And, last but not least, to remind you how important it is to maintain a sense of humor (albeit dark and a little twisted) through it all.

So kick off your shoes, grab a cup of hot tea or coffee, and take a good deep breath. We've got lots to talk about.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Judith Henry is a writer, teacher and speaker living in Tampa, Florida.

The connection between a caregiver-in-training childhood and assisting her elderly parents during the last phase of their lives is the heart and soul of *The Dutiful Daughter's Guide to Caregiving: A Practical Memoir*.

As a non-traditional student, meaning she was well beyond the age of her classmates, Judith received her bachelor's degree in psychology from St. Leo University and a master's in education from Indiana University.

The creator of a well-loved writer's group for caregivers, she also gives workshops and presentations on a variety of topics, including how to compose a legacy letter for family and friends, and having the last word by writing your own obituary.

DON'T BUY THIS BOOK IF:

1. You have too much free time on your hands.
2. You find the word “dutiful” a real turn-off.
3. You can cook dinner and talk with paramedics simultaneously.
4. You believe humor has no place in challenging situations.
5. You'd rather figure everything out by yourself.



Judith HENRY

A writer, teacher and speaker, Judith lives in Florida with her cat, Addie Jacob.

She can be reached at judithdhenry.com

For everyone else, there's *The Dutiful Daughter's Guide to Caregiving*, a combination of financial planner, family therapist, geriatric care manager, and cheeky best friend.

Chapter by chapter, it offers personal stories and practical wisdom on topics such as must-have legal documents; coping with stress and family dynamics; asking the right questions when speaking to doctors; choosing a transitional rehab center or nursing facility; and knowing what to include in a caregiver's tool box, aka your purse.

Filled with laughter, tears and lessons learned, this book is a valuable resource for anyone taking on more responsibility for an elderly parent's well-being.

"If you want to become more proficient in caring for your loved one, have your self-esteem raised, and understand those sad and humorous moments in the job of caregiving – read this book! The author is on your side."

**Ronnie Goldstein, LCSW, Licensed clinical social worker
and family therapist, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**